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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHVN #0360/01 1100925
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 200925Z APR 06
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9822
INFO RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 6500

S E C R E T VIENTIANE 000360

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, PRM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2016
TAGS: [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [LA](#)
SUBJECT: REPORTS OF MASSACRE OF HMONG CIVILIANS IN NORTHERN
VIENTIANE PROVINCE

REF: 04 VIENTIANE 984

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia M. Haslach, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Suggested press guidance is provided at the end of this cable.

¶2. (C) Two separate Hmong sources have provided details of an alleged attack by Lao People's Army (LPA) forces against an insurgent group in northern Vientiane Province in which 26 people, almost all women and children, were killed. According to a U.S.-based Hmong source, on April 6, at about 09:00, a company of LPA troops attacked a Hmong group in northern Vang Vieng district of Vientiane province, killing 26 Hmong. The source provided the names and ages of all those killed. Of the 26, only one was an adult male; all others in the group were children or females. This source claimed that a further four persons were wounded in the attack. A second Hmong source with close connections to the insurgency told us that the victims were members of an insurgent group under the command of Blua Shoua Her, and were ambushed while out gathering food. He claimed the group was unarmed. A handful of persons, including several children, managed to escape and pass on details of the attack to the insurgent leaders.

¶3. (S) These reports correspond closely to information provided by Embassy Bangkok sources regarding a "massacre" of suspected Hmong insurgents north of Vang Vieng in early April. LPA units in the Vang Vieng area had reported to more senior levels that they had killed nearly thirty "insurgents" in an encounter, but reported no weapons captured. The fact that no weapons were reported seized in that encounter led Embassy Bangkok sources to conclude most of those killed were likely women and children, a conclusion supported by the report from the U.S. Hmong source. Embassy Bangkok sources also noted that LPA authorities in Vientiane were suspicious of the body count in this encounter because of the lack of weapons, and threatened to censure the unit involved because of inaccurate reporting.

¶4. (S) Comment: These reports from three separate sources, which closely correspond in detail, leave us with little doubt that this "massacre" took place. The majority of those killed, according to the list provided by our U.S.-based Hmong source, were women and children, twelve of whom were under ten years of age. The fact that no weapons were seized also implies that the group offered little or no resistance to their attackers. Given the numbers of civilians killed, this represents the most serious human rights violation by LPA troops we know of in recent years.

¶5. (S) This reported attack brings to mind Time Magazine's September 2004 article detailing the killing of five children by Lao military in Saisomboun Special Zone in April of that year (reftel). In that case, although an alleged witness to

the attack brought out video footage of the aftermath of the massacre, there was no solid evidence linking LPA troops to the children's death. In this latest case, however, we have several reports confirming the event and making it clear that LPA forces at various levels were aware of the incident.

¶16. (S) Embassy will share the unclassified reports from our Hmong sources with our colleagues in the UN and diplomatic community in order to determine the best course for bringing this event to the attention of Lao authorities. Ambassador is seeking a meeting with the Vientiane province Governor to discuss the incident, and POL will meet with the MFA's Human Rights Unit for the same purpose. We have sent ICRC's Regional Representative the unclassified report as well, with the request he raise the issue with his MND contacts on his next Vientiane visit.

¶17. (S) Beyond this, we are planning for visiting DAS Eric John, who will be in Vientiane next week, to meet with our like-minded colleagues to discuss next steps. We caution, though, that getting traction on this issue with the government will be difficult: the GoL will certainly deny the event took place and seek to discredit the information. Moreover, the MFA is our only interlocutor on issues of this sort; getting MFA engaged enough to make inquiries of the Ministry of Defense will be challenging enough, to say nothing of getting MND to investigate the incident. However, this is an extraordinarily gross human rights violation that is far too serious to be ignored. End comment.

¶18. (C) We also offer the following suggested press guidance in the event reports of the killing become public:

Can the State Department confirm that a massacre of Hmong people took place in April? What is the State Department doing about this incident?

-- The Department is aware of reports of a massacre of civilians by Lao military forces in Vientiane province. The Embassy in Vientiane is looking into these reports. If it indeed took place, we deplore the killing of innocent women and children. We urge the Lao government to launch a serious investigation of the incident and punish those troops who were involved.

What is the US Government's policy regarding the Hmong insurgents in Laos?

-- We have consistently called for the Lao government to respect the rights of its ethnic minorities. We have a long-standing policy to urge the government to work towards a peaceful and transparent solution to the humanitarian issue of the domestic insurgency. We also implore both the Lao government and the insurgency to refrain from any actions that lead to the loss of life.

HASLACH